

# MOSS WOOD



## Newsletter

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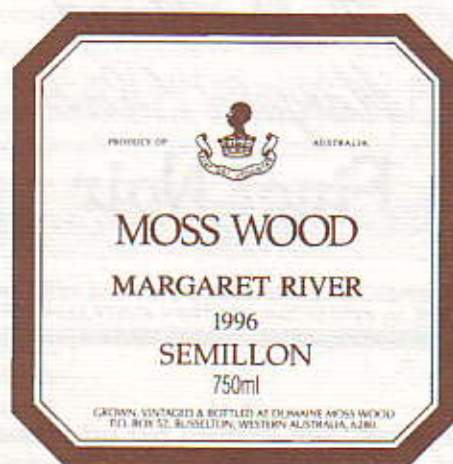
October, 1996

### The 1996 Moss Wood Semillon

The growing season leading up to the 1996 harvest in Margaret River was certainly a good one with consistent rainfall right up to Christmas and no seriously hot conditions throughout summer. This led to a better than average yield of semillon at Moss Wood. The February heat brought things along and, despite the increased yield, the vintage commenced on March 7th, pretty much on time. The grapes showed such wonderful flavours in the lead up to harvest (with some patches tasting better than ever) that Keith decided to do a grape tasting with Mike Davies of Ribbon Vale and Eddie Price of Amberley. The conclusion of that tasting was that the quality of semillon from the vintage was consistently brilliant across the region.

The picking went well with the grapes being added to the press no later than 11.30am on any given day. The new Wilmes press continues to bring great joy to the winemaking team as it processes the grapes superbly and produces significantly larger quantities of juice. There is no question that the quality of whites continues to soar thanks to the improved, gentler pressing. The free run juice plus pressings were combined, settled for seventy two hours (it is getting longer each year) in sealed tanks and then racked at the winemaker's convenience. There are considerable benefits in a longer settling period for the juice as it appears as though more flavour is extracted from the settling lees.

Fermentation took place at 18°C and lasted for fourteen days. After that the tanks were closed, sulphur dioxide was added and the lees were stirred three times per week. After four weeks, the wine was fine, filtered and bottled: this year was the earliest bottling ever, on Wednesday 5th June. The Semillon appears to have benefitted from the extra time in the bottle before release.



The 1996 Moss Wood Semillon has a medium straw colour with a green tint and perfumed aromas of tropical fruit salad: green apple, fig, quince, gooseberry and passionfruit. On the palate, it has similar tropical fruit flavours with overtones of yeasty, bready characters from the lees stirring. This delicious white is pristine, has fresh, intense fruitiness, a tight structure and good, crisp acidity on a finish which lingers. Keith understands that most will be seduced by the wine's youthful fruit flavours but strongly recommends cellaring two or three bottles to drink between twelve and fifteen years of age. One of the best ever Moss Wood Semillons. *(See the back page for the Semillon Ratings Chart)*



## The 1994 Moss Wood Pinot Noir

This was a very good vintage for Margaret River with a great ripe finish following a summer in which the weather was consistently warm but not hot. The temperature rose a few points in February which enabled the vines to ripen quickly. Consequently, instead of the expected gradual picking of pinot noir at Moss Wood, it was necessary to bring all the grapes in as quickly as possible. The condition of the fruit was excellent with no bird damage or disease.

The grapes were crushed with an inclusion of 22% whole bunches: the average as fallen from a peak in the 1988-89 vintages of about 60% to between 20% and 30% at the present time. Keith believes that the spicy stalky overtones were too dominant in wines that were allowed more than 40% whole bunch inclusion.

In tanks, the must was cooled to 10°C and pumped over twice without yeast inoculation. On the third day, yeasts were introduced and fermentation commenced. Temperatures were allowed to rise to 30°C and the fermenters hand plunged four to six times a day (depending on how vigorous the proprietor was feeling).

At 0° beaume, volunteers were asked to strip naked and jump into the tanks. In this manner, each fermenter received half an hour of pigeage (the action of punching down the skins and other solids to encourage the extraction of colour and tannins and to encourage aeration of the wine). Keith comments that there are a surprising lack of female helpers at this stage of the winemaking process (unlike the situation elsewhere) and has indicated that there are some vacancies for willing helpers during the next vintage.

As pigeage results in the treatment of some uncrushed grapes, it also extends the period of fermentation for a few more days. On approximately day 14, the wine was drained and transferred into stainless steel tanks, with all the pressings being included. The wine underwent the malolactic fermentation in stainless steel and is then racked into barrels. It was aged in oak (33% of which was new) for fourteen months before being bottled in December 1995.



The 1994 Moss Wood Pinot Noir has a medium to deep red brick hue and a nose that is typical of the variety from this vineyard: aromas of strawberries, plums, red cherries with some spicy, sappy overtones from the inclusion of whole bunches. On the palate, the wine is soft and quite generous with redcurrant and dark cherry flavours as well as the beginnings of some earthy complexity. With bottle aging, the wine should take on more earthy, gamey characters with possibly a touch of mushroom and truffles. At present, the 1994 Pinot is a neatly balanced red with attractive sweet fruit, moderate acidity and reasonably firm tannins on a soft, oaky finish. The wine has good cellaring potential and will probably be at its best from the age of about 10 years onwards.

Keith believes that it is a very good example of Moss Wood Pinot and is currently on a par with those produced in 1990 and 1991 but, with bottle development, should rival the great pinot noirs of 1985 and 1986.



## The 1994 Moss Wood Pemberton Pinot Noir

Keith Mugford has made a pinot noir from Pemberton each year since 1991. He made the first pinot released under the Smithbrook label from the 1991 vintage: about 800 bottles in all. Not surprisingly, it was not commercially released. Keith made wines under the Moss Wood Pemberton label using fruit from Robert Danti's vineyard at Manjimup in 1991 and 1992. Since then, the Pemberton Pinot has been produced from grapes grown on the Smithbrook vineyard by Philip May. Smithbrook also produce an excellent Pinot Noir under their own label which is made by Howard Park's John Wade.

Year	Vineyard	Rating	Comments
1991	Smithbrook	9	Dark fruits beetroot dark cherry, spicy, concentrated, lovely mouthfeel and length.
1991	Danti	8	Finer, spicy overtones, attractive.
1992	Danti	8	Big, tannic, meaty.
1993	Smithbrook	8	Delicate dark fruits, cherry spice, earthy undertones.
1994	Smithbrook	8+	Similar to the 93 but richer.
1995	Smithbrook	8	Ripe, cherry, plum characters, quite tannic, very low yields.

The fruit from the 1994 vintage was disease free, in good condition and showed consistent colour. The yields were good, on high side compared with Moss Wood because of the closely planted vineyard at Smithbrook. The quality of the site with its good soils and aspect also support these yields. Keith aims to achieve similiar levels of ripeness to the Moss Wood pinot and he has worked closely with vineyard manager and viticulturist, Philip May, to ensure this.

The Moss Wood team travel the two and a half hours to Pemberton to pick the Smithbrook fruit. It's all a bit of an adventure, says Keith, at least for the younger members of the brigade who relish the opportunity to camp out on the night before the picking with its associated hijinks. There's a hint of apology in the way he notes his indebtedness to Philip and Elizabeth May for their patience, tolerance and incredible hospitality.

The grapes are transported back to Moss Wood and processed in the same way as Margaret River pinot.

The 1994 Moss Wood Pemberton Pinot Noir is medium to deep red and shows primary fruit characters of cherries and beetroot complexed by spicy overtones and some earthiness. Unlike the Margaret River pinot, the primary fruit characters are savoury rather than sweet. The palate is finer than the Margaret River wine, yet the texture and flavours are lively and they linger on the wine's dry finish. The acidity and tannins are more pronounced yet compliment the wine's varietal statement.

Keith believes that the 1994 Pemberton Pinot is one of the best yet produced in the region. It is a moderately good cellaring prospect and he would encourage cellaring for about five years as he believes that the wine will drink best between about seven and ten years of ago. Because of the lack of history for the wine and the region, Keith recommends caution with extended cellaring.

## Pinot Noir Vintage Chart

Vintage	Harvest Date	Beaume	Yield Vintage (tonnes/ha)	Rating (out of 10)
1979	17 February	12.3°	6.6	4
1980	29 February	14.2°	3.5	4
1981	4 March	13.1°	3.8	10
1982	13 March	12.95°	8.2	5
1983	19 February	12.85°	6.0	6
1984	16 February	12.9°	5.7	6
1985	25 February	13.3°	6.4	10
1986	24 February	13.3°	5.8	10
1987	24 February	12.9°	5.8	8
1988	10 February	13.1°	6.0	8
1989	15 March	12.9°	6.5	6
1990	16 March	13.4°	8.5	9
1991	10 March	13.3°	10.0	9
1992	28 February	13.5°	8.8	8
1993	3 March	13.3°	8.2	8
1994	1 March	13.5°	11.0	9
1995		13.5°	9.2	9+



## Moss Wood in the UK

If you wish to send Moss Wood to Britain, our agents, Stones of Belgravia, have the complete range. They can arrange delivery to anywhere on the mainland. Mike Hall also has a large and interesting range of wines from around the world, including plenty of Western Australian gems such as Alkoomi and Cape Mentelle.

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## A Gourmet Traveller on Moss Wood

*Australian Gourmet Traveller's* wine scribe, Huon Hooke, has written about changes to the Moss Wood Cabernet in the October edition of the magazine. Lovers of Moss Wood will find Huon's article of great interest.

## A chip off the old vineyard block

By the time the newsletter is posted, golfing professional, Wayne Smith, will have brought Ian Baker Finch to Moss Wood. When asked whether the visit was to satisfy the golfing superhero's interest in great wine or to revive Keith's golfing career, the Moss Wood winemaker refused to be drawn. He did, however, make the point that it was not his putting but his chipping that was the problem.

## Saving Young Vines

As part of Vineyard Manager Ian 'Tinker' Bell's efforts to upgrade his qualifications, he recently took part in a residential course at Charles Sturt University. An interesting side trip enabled Tinker to catch up with Sarah MacLean of Global Green Viticultural Products and inspect snap-max in use. Sarah had visited Moss Wood and had impressed the team with snap-max, a UV stabilised plastic which shelters young vines in a micro-climate that retains moisture yet allows the air to circulate and thus enhance vine growth. The untrained vines grow straight in the snap-max covers which also protect them from wind, weed sprays and predators such as rabbits and kangaroo. They will be used to protect the four acres of new semillon and chardonnay vines on the School Fees Block.

## 1997 Chardonnay

Unseasonal springtime weather has had disastrous consequence for next year's chardonnay crop. One of the major problems facing the production of chardonnay in Margaret River is the strong winds that occur during the flowering of the vines. It is this which keeps the yields of this variety incredibly low in the region. Wild winds that have persisted during the first three weeks of spring have done significant damage to young chardonnay shoots at Moss Wood and are likely to reduce the volume of that wine by thirty to fifty per cent.

## 1994 Moss Wood Semillon Ratings

Vintage	Harvest Date	Beaume	Yield Vintage (tonnes/ha)	Rating (out of 10)
1983	5 March	12.3°	13.6	9
1984	5 March	12.2°	12.4	7
1985	28 February	12.0°	10.0	9
1986	28 February	12.4°	9.1	7
1987	9 March	12.0°	13.5	8
1988	18 February	12.1°	9.6	7
1989	15 March	12.3°	12.5	7
1990	21 March	12.4°	13.0	8
1991	26 March	11.9°	19.0	6
1992	3 March	12.5°	13.9	8
1993	5 March	12.7°	9.0	10
1994	10 March	12.9°	11.0	9
1995	23 February	13.2°	10.8	8+
1996	7 March	12.9°	14.9	9